

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 04279 141806Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 PRS-01 L-01 PM-03 INR-05
SY-02 SCA-01 SAB-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 /025 W
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 4279

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, MILI, PN, PQ
SUBJECT: GOP REQUEST TO EXTRADITE U.S. SOLDIER

REF: PANAMA 4178

SUMMARY: LOCAL MEDIA PLAY ON CUEVAS CASE HAS BEEN QUITE
RESTRAINED SINCE HIS SURRENDER, BUT CONTINUES TO ANTICIPATE
HIS RETURN TO PANAMA. NORIEGA HAS COOPERATED IN SENDING
GN WITNESSES TO PRELIMINARY HEARING, BUT THIS IS
AMBIVALENT--IT COULD SPRING FROM A DESIRE TO SEE CUEVAS
PUNISHED BY SOMEONE, OR EQUALLY WELL FROM A HOPE THAT
COOPERATION WOULD FACILITATE CUEVAS' RETURN TO GOP
AUTHORITIES. END SUMMARY.

1. LOCAL PRESS PLAY ON CUEVAS CASE HAS BEEN RATHER
NOTABLY RESTRAINED AND FAIRLY FACTUAL SINCE HE SURRENDERED
A WEEK AGO TO US MILITARY AUTHOTITIES.

2. RELATIVELY BRIEF ARTICLES (E.G., FBIS/PANAMA PA 091907Y
ON "REPUBLICA" JUNE 8) ANNOUNCED THAT GOP HAD REQUESTED
EXTRADITION. JUNE 10 "CRITICA" SAID "THE PANAMANIAN
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 04279 141806Z

AUTHORITIES ARE EXPECTING AT ANY MOMENT THAT.., CUEVAS WILL
BE HANDED OVER TO THEM..." ARTICLE ALSO SAID A PRELIMINARY
HEARING ON "CHARGES OF DESERTION FROM THE US ARMY" WOULD
BE HELD JUNE 13 (FBIS/PANAMA PA 102031Y). "CRITICA" GOSSIP
COLUMN "DESDE EL CAFETIN" THE SAME DAY SAID A REPORTER
FROM THE PAPER WOULD TRY TO ATTEND.

3. "REPUBLICA" FOR AFTERNOON JUNE 13 CARRIED AN ARTICLE NOTING THAT THE PRELIMINARY HEARING HAD BEEN HELD AND EXPECTING AT SOME LENGTH THAT CUEVAS WOULD ULTIMATELY BE EXTRADITED. ARTICLE CONVEYS THE IMPRESSION THAT MILITARY HEARING RELATES LARGELY TO CHARGES INCLUDING AWOL AND THEFT OF THE RIFLE AND IS PRELIMINARY AND PARALLEL TO, RATHER THAN INSTEAD OF, ANY CHARGES IN PANAMA SUBSEQUENT TO EXTRADITION. ARTICLE ALSO CITES FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF RELATIONS WITH U.S. CARLOS GARAY DESCRIBING THE PANAMA-CANAL ZONE EXTRADITION PROCEDURES.

4. ON TUESDAY, JUNE 14 MOST PAPERS CARRIED TEXT OF A SOUTHCOM NEWS RELEASE ANNOUNCING THAT FORMAL INVESTIGATION HAD BEGUN AND THAT PANAMANIAN AUTHORITIES WERE COOPERATING. "CRITICA", HOWEVER, REGALED ITS READERS--AFTER A BRIEF AND NOT TOO INACCURATE REHASH OF THE NEWS RELEASE--WITH A TALE OF REPORTER ERIC AUERBACH'S FUTILE EFFORTS TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE HEARING, INCLUDING THE NAMES OF ALL THOSE WHO DENIED HIM ADMITTANCE, AND PHOTOS OF THE BUILDING WHERE THE HEARING WAS HELD, OF THE GN WITNESSES LEAVING THE BUILDING, OF THE FORT AMADOR GATE, ETC. THESE WERE ALL ON INSIDE PAGES AND THE TREATMENT WAS, FOR "CRITICA", NOT OVERLY SPLASHY. THERE WAS NO FURTHER EDITORIAL COMMENT.

5. ON JUNE 9, SOUTHCOM ACTING PROVOST MARSHAL DELIVERED A LETTER TO NORIEGA (COPY POUCHED ARA/PAN), FORMALLY REQUESTING LATTER'S COOPERATION IN OBTAINING PANAMANIAN-CITIZEN WITNESSES FOR MILITARY INVESTIGATION AT FT. AMADOR 0900 MONDAY, JUNE 13. ACTING PROVOST MARSHAL REPORTED THAT NORIEGA WAS QUITE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PANAMA 04279 141806Z

FORTHCOMING, PROMISED TO MAKE WITNESSES AVAILABLE AND INVITED ARMY CID PERSONNEL TO INSPECT PHYSICAL EVIDENCE IN PANAMANIAN POSSESSION AT NATIONAL GUARD HEADQUARTERS.

6. AT PRELIMINARY HEARING, THE REQUESTED WITNESSES INCLUDING THE WOUNDED NATIONAL GUARDSMAN APPEARED AS REQUESTED, ACCOMPANIED BY SEVERAL OFFICERS INCLUDING NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS AMONG THEM LIAISON OFFICER WITH CANAL ZONE MILITARY AND POLICE, MAJ. FERRUFINO.

7. COMMENT: RELATIVE CALM IN THE MEDIA DOES NOT INDICATE LACK OF INTEREST IN THE CASE, BUT RATHER LOOKS TO US LIKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO HOLD THE LID ON PUBLIC COMMENT UNTIL WE HAVE RESPONDED TO GOP EXTRADITION REQUEST. NORIEGA'S COOPERATION WITH US MILITARY INVESTIGATION, WHILE A GOOD AND WELCOME SIGN, IS ALSO AMBIVALENT. ON THE ONE HAND, HE MAY HAVE CONCLUDED (AS SOUTHCOM READS IT) THAT CUEVAS IS OUT OF HIS REACH FOR GOOD AND JUST WANTS TO SEE CUEVAS PUNISHED BY SOMEONE. OR ON THE OTHER, HE COULD BE EXTENDING THIS COOPERATION IN THE HOPE

THAT IT WILL FACILITATE A USG DECISION, ONCE ITS FORMALITIES ARE COMPLETE, TO TURN HIM OVER. DATE OF MILITARY INVESTIGATIVE HEARING WAS, AS FAR AS WE KNOW, NO PARTICULAR SECRET--BUT IT IS INTERESTING THAT IT SHOWED UP ACCURATELY IN GOP-GUIDED (PROBABLY, IN THIS CASE, NORIEGA-GUIDED) "CRITICA" THE DAY AFTER THE SOUTH-COM LETTER WENT TO NORIEGA.

8. WE STILL SEE NO SIGNS SUFFICIENT TO GAUGE THE PROBABLE STRENGTH AND DIRECTION OF GOP REACTION IF ADVISED THAT CUEVAS WILL NOT BE EXTRADITED. BUT WE CONTINUE TO HOLD TO OUR RECOMMENDATION REFTEL THAT, BY A VERY SMALL BALANCE AMONG THE COMPLEX FACTORS BEARING ON THIS SITUATION, AS WE SEE THEM HERE, IT WOULD DO THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST LESS OVERALL DAMAGE TO REJECT THE PANAMANIAN EXTRADITION REQUEST THAN TO HAND CUEVAS BACK TO THEM.
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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 14-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
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TAGS: PDIP, MILI, PN, PQ, (CUEVAS, ALBERTO)
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